

2/18/08 - Monday, February 18, 2008

CITY OF EAU CLAIRE

PLAN COMMISSION MINUTES

Meeting of February 18, 2008

City Hall, Council Chambers

7:00 p.m.

Members Present: Messrs: Levandowski, FitzGerald, Kayser, Waedt, Kaiser, Vande Loo, Davis, Hughes

Staff Present: Messrs. Reiter, Ivory, Fieber, Amundson, Noel

The meeting was chaired by Mr. Levandowski.

1. REZONING (Z-1407-08) - TR-1B, to R-1A, Woodhaven Road

Mr. Noel presented the staff report outlining Expressway Rice Lake, LLC's, request to rezone a parcel from Temporary R-1B to R-1A. The site is located on the east side of Woodhaven Road and north of LaSalle Street and the new zoning would allow for a single-family house with septic and well systems.

Neil Haselwander spoke in favor of the project. No one appeared in opposition.

Mr. FitzGerald moved to approve the rezoning with conditions noted in the staff report. Mr. Kasyer seconded and the motion carried.

2. REZONING (Z-1408-08) - TR-1A, R-1 and R-3P to R-3P, Princeton Crossing Condominiums; and PRELIMINARY CONDO PLAT (P-1-08) - Princeton Crossing Condominiums Plat; and SITE PLAN (SP-0806) - Princeton Crossing 4-plex Units

Mr. Reiter presented the staff report. The applicant requests to rezone property from Temporary R-1A, R-1, and R-3P to R-3P, to adopt a General Development Plan (Site Plan) for the Princeton Crossing development, and to approve its Preliminary Condo Plat. The 6.9 acre site is located at the southwest corner of Black Avenue and Providence Court, north of the North Crossing. The project consists of ten 4-unit buildings for a total of 40 residential dwellings, built in five phases. The project multi-family density is moderate or 5.8 units per acre and consistent with the Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Various plans indicate the design and layout of the buildings, private drives, driveways, parking, drainage and landscaping. The proposed private drives would link Black Avenue with Statz Avenue and a 310 foot cul-de-sac would extend northwards. Mr. Reiter noted the required conditions if the commission were to approve the item, and added the condition the applicant provide a parking lot and private drive lighting plan.

Neil Haselwander, 3705 Freedom Drive, spoke in favor of his project. He provided a brief history of the site and indicated which demographic segment he would be targeting based off market trends. This led to the style he chose for the 4-plexes with no basement and one-car garages. The private drive from Black Avenue is proposed to extend over to Statz Avenue because the Board of Directors for the condominium association to the north did not want a private drive running from Providence Court to the proposed 310 foot cul-de-sac. Thus, it was his only option to make a through street. He understood the single-family home owners concerns along Declaration Drive and Statz Avenue and would provide sufficient landscape screening, and as the project got built, his ultimate intention with the 310 foot cul-de-sac is to extend it north to La Salle Street to provide another outlet dispersing traffic.

John Bowman, 2107 Providence Court, president of the 67-unit Providence Village Condominium Association, stated the Board of Directors oppose the project and prefer to have the property remain as zoned and stay a buffer zone from the interchange. The project does not compliment the existing condominiums to the north and they have safety and traffic concerns with children present.

Jack Hestekin, 1909 Declaration Drive, had concerns about the proposed drainage.

Lawrence Stowell, 2121 Statz Avenue, had traffic volume concerns for children safety.

Ricky Merkel, 2005 Declaration Drive, had questions regarding the difference between private drives versus public roads, their maintenance, and emergency vehicle access. He was not happy with the destruction of the natural setting and provided pictures of such.

Scott Randal, 2019 Statz Avenue, worried about traffic increases and opposed the project. He wanted the applicant to eliminate the Statz Avenue connection and extend the cul-de-sac north to La Salle Street.

Sharon Lee, 1830 Statz Avenue, said she organized a protest petition because there are 41 children that live close to the proposed development and the additional traffic could cause safety issues. She is opposed to the project, but if it moves forward, wants the 310 foot cul-de-sac to be the outlet instead of the connection with Statz Avenue.

Bob Knueppel, 2103 Statz Avenue, opposed the rezoning and said it would be a better single-family development. He believed the proposed development would hurt surrounding property values. He asked about the City's road assessments policy.

Don Rassbach, 2008 Statz Avenue, stated he is not in favor of private streets but thought extending the cul-de-sac north to La Salle Street was a preferable option.

Sue Lynett, 1933 Declaration Drive, stated no private street should be connected to Statz Avenue and asked for a developer timeline for landscaping restoration.

Chris Ackerman, 1916 Declaration Drive, spoke in regard to the neighborhood having properties that are starting to become more run-down.

Dave Hanson, 2011 Statz Avenue, said the private street to Statz Avenue was a bad>

Theresa Lien, 1917 Declaration Drive, wanted the commission to really think about the impact of the project on the surrounding properties and how the natural landscape was being transformed, especially with the removal of the hill for off-site fill.

Commissioners discussed various concerns of the project. Of key significance were: 1) how the private drives were laid out; 2) the future traffic/safety impacts on abutting property; 3) phasing of the development; 4) if the 4-plex building designs met the Multi-family Housing Manual; 5) site planning issues such as drainage, landscape screening, sidewalks, and driveway width/islands.

Mr. Amundson responded to questions regarding traffic, drainage, and if the cul-de-sac could be extended north to La Salle Street despite the difficult topography. He stated from their traffic analysis, the peak time estimation would not strictly cause problems for the carrying capacity of Statz Avenue and Black Avenue. For drainage, roughly half of the site's runoff would flow towards the single-family homes to the west. Basements should not be impacted because stormwater will flow into a grassy swale and then under the North Crossing; and the proposed 310 foot cul-de-sac could be extended by removing the hilly terrain.

Mr. Haselwander stated phasing was based off location of existing utilities and roads. If phasing were rearranged, to facilitate sooner the La Salle Street cul-de-sac extension, it would require more up-front improvement cost. Complete build-out could take three to four years and he anticipates the hills would be removed in two years, clearing way for the cul-de-sac extension. He noted the 4-plex designs were chosen for the empty-nester population segment and front doors on the units that faced the interchange were turned to the side making them more private.

Mr. Vande Loo moved for approval with staff's conditions and added Condition #8 (provide a drive/parking lot lighting plan), seconded by Mr. Davis. Commissioners then voted, those in favor of the project were Mr. Vande Loo and Mr. Davis. Those opposing were Messrs. Levandowski, FitzGerald, Kayser, Waedt, Kaiser and Hughes. The motion failed and requests were denied.

3. ROD AND GUN PARK - Master Plan

Mr. Fieber presented the staff report outlining the various elements of the park's master plan and why they were recommended. He asked the commission for their input on if the area where pictures are most taken should be maintained as wetland or turf, if the handicap accessible path should be serpentine or sweeping, and if there should be additional pavilion shelters in the park.

Bob & Penny Von Haden, 908 Parkridge Drive, spoke on behalf of Friends of Rod and Gun Park. They want the park to be protected and wanted to attach a number of conditions onto the Plan Commission's recommendation. These proposed conditions were: No organized biking or skiing in the park, leave the current pavilion and playground the way they are, don't build other pavilions unless there is outside funding. He also addressed several items with the proposed master plan, those being: the hill should not be cut into for the parking lot, reevaluate the serpentine path, maybe a zigzag path is a better option, leave the water wheels, and take out the scenic wetland overlook. He was also very concerned that the picture-taking area does not become a wetland and remains as maintained turf.

Penny Von Haden, 908 Parkridge Drive, stated the 'wish-bone' path and existing drinking fountain should be kept.

Susan Kaul, 1932 W. Mead Street, gave some history on the park and thought the Soil and Water Conservation District should be given a chance to review the plan. She wanted the park to remain low-impact and all natural.

Mr. Kaiser left the meeting at 9:42 p.m.

Bob Schneider, 603 Lake Street, stated a master plan is needed to obtain grant funding and the particulars could be worked out as they came up after general approval.

Steve Ludwig, 1517 Keith Street, Chair of the Waterways & Parks Commission, stated they are in favor of the plan and details can be worked out later.

Mike Mills, 2719 3rd Street, said park improvements should meet the needs of disabled persons.

Commissioners discussed the proposed plan and offered feedback.

Mr. Davis moved to recommend the master plan. Mr. Vande Loo seconded and the motion carried.

4. SITE PLAN (SP-0804) - Apartment Additions to Rooming House, 1240 S. Farwell St.

Mr. Noel presented the staff report and indicated the Third Ward Neighborhood met with the applicant to discuss the project.

The neighborhood Steering Committee voted 5 to 4, with one abstention, in favor of the project and asked the applicant to agree to a number of conditions.

The applicant, Pam Lovelien, stated she agreed to the conditions that the neighborhood asked for.

Mr. FitzGerald moved to approve the site plan, along with four out of five neighborhood conditions: 1) reduce the height of the shielded lighting to 20 feet; 2) plant six-foot arborvitaes along the back property line; 3) plant mature landscaping at the front (including 'front sides' of the house to help mask the foundation); and 4) provide a bicycle rack. Number 5 was not applicable because of the staff condition that the applicant relinquishes the rooming house license. Mr. Waedt seconded and the motion carried.

5. DISCUSSION/DIRECTION

A. Electronic Billboards

Mr. Ivory presented a memorandum detailing Lamar Advertising's request to amend the Sign Code to allow digital billboards. Lamar previously submitted two sign permits to convert conforming billboards to digital, however, the code does not allow billboards to be directly illuminated by use of either bulbs or electronic diodes. Mr. Ivory provided background on past commission discussion and research on what other area communities are doing. Staff recommendation was no change to the ordinance because of visual pollution and driver safety concerns, but that if the commission wanted to disagree with staff, a set of alternative provisions was provided.

Rich Reinart and Bill Mitchell from Lamar Advertising in Marshfield, spoke in favor of allowing digital billboards. Mr. Reinart stated that the technology provides for a cleaner more attractive looking billboard than conventional. He thought a one- to two-minute message hold requirement would render the technology/cost ineffective. He preferred a six-second change-over. He showed how they could be used to display public service messages.

Commissioners discussed the matter. Some thought the City should wait and see the impacts of digital billboards in other communities and evaluate the outcomes of the recently passed electronic message center sign ordinance. Some thought digital would be more attractive and wanted staff action working on a draft ordinance. The commission decided to have staff bring back the item for discussion after the new commission was formed in a couple of months.

B. Structural Modifications to Non-conforming Billboards

Mr. Ivory presented Lamar Advertising's request to allow face frame changes to nonconforming billboards. This is currently not permitted because the Sign Code does not allow any structural part of the sign to be improved if it is nonconforming. An improvement as proposed would inherently prolong the life of the nonconforming sign. Mr. Ivory stated staff is opposed to the change to the ordinance and provided some information on what other communities allow for improvements to nonconformities. He noted that if the commission disagreed with the staff recommendation that an alternative would be to allow a sign to be changed conditioned that another nonconforming billboard be removed.

Rich Reinart and Bill Mitchell from Lamar Advertising, spoke in favor of allowing the retrofits and believed the face frame changes are not structural and make the signs look more attractive. The new frame will allow for a more eco-friendly vinyl poster than the traditional paper glued-on style. They were in favor to change the ordinance to allow changes up to 50% of the value of billboard sign. They stated that retrofits cost about 5% to 10% of the total value of the sign.

Commissioners discussed the lifespan and valuation of billboards as it related to nonconforming status and a potential 50% rule. Most commissioners believed if there are going to be billboards, they should look as good as possible and the retrofits accomplish that goal.

Mr. FitzGerald moved to instruct staff to draft an ordinance change for a 50% value rule for nonconforming sign retrofits. Seconded by Mr. Davis. All ayes.

C. Code Compliance Items

None.

D. Future Agenda Items

None.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of February 4, 2008, were approved.